Tourism

Getting the balance right

Tourism in the Yorkshire Dales National Park is essential to the local economy and its communities, as millions of visitors travel to the area every year to enjoy its special qualities. However, along with the socio-economic benefits visitors provide, pressures are placed on resources; such as services, infrastructure and the natural environment.

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) works alongside many organisations and local businesses to promote the National Park, as a welcoming and friendly place, whilst increasing understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities. There is an emphasis on understanding and enjoyment, rather than increasing visitor numbers; however, the YDNPA also recognises how the National Park, tourism and the well-being of the economy of the area are all inextricably linked.

Any new developments to enhance tourism must consider the National Park's statutory purposes. The Environment Act 1995 defines the purposes of National Park Authorities in England and Wales, including the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA), as:

- **to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the national parks;**
- **to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities [of the national parks] by the public.**

The YDNPA is also involved in visitor management, such as running three National Park Visitor Centres, its car parks and toilet facilities and maintaining the public rights of way network across the National Park. It also delivers a wide range of events to promote local distinctiveness and facilitate enjoyment and appreciation of the area, such as events for local tourism businesses or supporting with organisation of large scale events, such as challenge events.

Growth of Tourism in the National Park

Visitors have been attracted to the Yorkshire Dales since long before it became a National Park. The dramatic landscapes were sought by writers and artists in the 18th century, during which time interest in recreational activities were growing. By 1781 there was already a tour guide to the caves in the Ingleborough and Settle area and Weathercote Cave in Chapel-le-dale could be visited for one shilling with a guide. As transport improved the number of visitors started to rise.

By the late 19th century new railways had been built across the Yorkshire Dales, the most famous being the Settle to Carlisle line, providing a link between the Midlands and Scotland. Rail passenger traffic reached its peak during 1900 -1914. Railway guides recommended local beauty spots accessible from the railway stations. City dwellers were able to access the area easily and cheaply and see the countryside as a dramatic contrast to their heavily industrialised home towns.

The real boom in tourism has taken place this century with the rise in ownership of cars. (130,000 in 1914, 2 million in 1950, 20 million in 1990 and 31.8 million by 2020, DETR

2021). Leisure interests have expanded as people have found both the time and the money to travel and enjoy recreational activities.

To read a more detailed history of tourism in the National Park – read here.



Tourists in Grassignton (©YDNPA)

Tourism today

Volumes and Spending

The Great Britain Day Visits Survey (2019) estimated that nationally 1.7 billion leisure day visits were made from home during 2019, involving a total expenditure of around £67 billion. 22% of these visits were made to the countryside.

The Yorkshire Dales National Park is surrounded by conurbations on two sides: to the south, the urban areas of West Yorkshire and Lancashire and to the northeast, Teesside; with most day visitors come from these areas. Based on the Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Model (STEAM), in 2019 the National Parks Tourism firgures were recorded as:

- 6.5 million visitor days.
- Provided £374 million to the region's economy.
- Provided employment for 5,353 (FTE) jobs.

For more information about STEAM visit, here.

From 2016-2019, the National Park has experienced a 13.7% increase in total visitor numbers compared to 2015. A more detailed breakdown of where these increases have been observed can be seen below:

% Increase	Jan-Mar	Apr-June	July-Sep	Oct-Dec
Visitor Numbers	16%	9%	13%	21%
Day Visitors	14%	6%	11%	19%
Staying Visitors	41%	30%	29%	40%
Serviced Accomodation	20%	19%	18%	27%
Non-serviced Accomodation	101%	53%	48%	76%

There are also popular tourist destinations in close proximity to the National Park, such as the towns of Skipton and Ilkley, which provide benefits to tourism within the National Park. This is known as the 'Area of Influence' and when including this area with the National Park boundary figures; 10.4 million total visitors (of which 8.9 million were day visitors) were recorded. This accounted for £805 million (2019) of visitor spending.

Visitor Surveys

The National Park is rich in special qualities, such as the natural beauty of the landscape, rare and nationally important wildlife and a variety of exceptional cultural heritage. This variety appeals to visitors in different ways, but also how they expeirence them can differ greatly. The results above are achieved by conducting a Visitor Survey at a number of locations around the National Park.

A large scale Visitor Survey is conducted by the YDNPA every 5 years in an attempt to understand peoples motivations for visiting, their perceptions of the special qualities and the characteristics of the visitor. The most recent large scale survey was conducted in 2017, however in 2020 there was also a smaller survey carried out to understand how the coronovirus pandemic was affecting visitors experience of the National Park.

Find more results at Yorkshire Dales National Park Visitor Survey 2017.

Visitor Survey 2020

The Coronovirus Pandemic from 2020 - 2021 has had a significant effect on Tourism within the National Park and initial figures from the Visitor Survey 2020 reveal some interesting trends. Government restrictions on travel and business operations have obviously had a marked impact on people being able to visit and spend money within the National Park. however the long term impact of the pandemic on local businesses and communities remains to be seen. The 2020 Visitor Survey results recorded the following key findings:

- 27% first time visitors, compared to 14% in 2017.
- 25% of visitors (36% first time visitors) said being by water was one of the things they enjoyed; this was an increase from 16% in 2017.
- For first time visitors 16% said they wouldn't have come to the Yorkshire Dales National Park that day if it was 'normal times' (i.e. no Covid restrictions).
- In our 2017 visitor survey 56% of our visitors were age 55+; whereas in 2020 this reduced to 36%. 22% of all visitors in 2020 were in the 25-34 age group category, compared with 23% of all respondents were aged between 16 and 44 years in 2017.

Where are visitors coming from?

Top 3 regions	2017	Top 3 regions	2020
Yorkshire and The Humber	37%	West Yorkshire	30%
North West	21%	North Yorkshire	20%
North East	8%	Rest of Yorkshire	10%

What do visitors enjoy about their visit?

Top 5 reponses	2017	2020
Scenery and landscape	84%	72%
Peace and tranquility	33%	29%
Walks/walking	35%	35%
Getting away from it all	26%	20%
Being by water	16%	25%

What activities do visitors participate in when they visit?

Top 5 Responses	2017
Café/tea room	64%
General Sightseeing	58%
Walking (more than 1hour)	57%
Country Pub	47%
Walking (less than 1hour)	28%

Find more results at The YDNPA Visitor Survey, 2020



Visitors at Bolton Abbey (©Tammy Bates)

Managing sustainable tourism for the future

National Park Management Plan

The future vison for Tourism within the National Park is stated in the National Park Management Plan 2019-24 (NPMP), as:

“By 2040 The Yorkshire Dales National Park will be a friendly, open and welcoming place with outstanding opportunities to enjoy its special qualities.”

The NPMP, outlines some of the ways in which the YDNPA and a wide range of partners and organisations, aim to increase the value of tourism to the local economy by 2024, whilst ensuring the National Park is a leading destination for sustainable tourism. Some of the relevant objectives are listed below:

- Maintain the National Park as a place where a true sense of tranquillity, remoteness and solitude can be found, and, by 2021, obtain Dark Skies Reserve status to enhance and promote enjoyment of its night sky.
- Improve the quality, variety and marketing of the tourism ‘offer’ to encourage more overnight stays and more visitors in the quieter months, so that the value of tourism grows by at least 5% in real terms by 2024.
- Promote the Yorkshire Dales National Park as a leading sustainable tourism destination, including enhancing the locations of 4 National Park Centres to create ‘visitor hubs’ that promote local distinctiveness and assist destination promotion for local activities, accommodation, food and itineraries.
- Develop and promote new events, festivals and attractions based on the National Park’s special qualities and local distinctiveness, so that at least 10% of visitors each year are coming for the first time



The National Park was acredited with Dark Sky status in 2021 (©Danny Lawson)

<u>The Local Plan</u>

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Local Plan is a development strategy and its purpose is to support the delivery of sustainable development, such as the objectives in the NPMP. It sets out local policy to direct development decisions and guide planning applications, such as changes in land use and new buildings.

The Plan supports developments that benefit the toursm industry, such as enhancing visitor accomodation to increase overnight stays; however, it also continues ‘to safeguard the

special qualities that make the National Park distinctive' and only encourages high standard development that will serve for many generations to come.

'If a new development is of high quality it will add to the high quality of the National Park environment and will tend to encourage spending, create employment, and maintain quality of life for residents.'

To read the The Yorkshire Dales National Park Local Plan, visit here here.

Further Information

- Read more about the current tourism stretegy, in 'Special Qualities, Special Experiences'. This document explains in more detail how the YDNPA will set out to achieve the objectives in the NPMP.
- Find out about the 'Yorkshire Dales National Park Tourism Partnership'; a group of local authorities and Destination Management Organisations, including Nidderdale AONB, North Pennines AONB and Forest of Bowland AONB, that meet twice a year to discuss tourism delivery to encourage good cross-boundary working with neighbouring areas.
- Further information about range of support offered by the National Park Authority for tourism businesses, such as the local distinctiveness project: Distinctly Dales.
- Find out about the Sustainable Development Fund and how it has funded a range of projects such as sustainable transport to eco-tourism that has directly or indirectly benefited tourism within the National Park.